



For Immediate Release: May 5, 2016

Event Date: May 6, 2016, 12 pm – 5 pm

Event Location:

First Court of Appeals

301 Fannin, North Courtroom

Houston, TX 77002

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Texas Stakeholders Gather to Commemorate the 15 Year Anniversary of the Fair Defense Act

HOUSTON— Criminal justice stakeholders gather tomorrow to mark the 15th anniversary of the Texas Fair Defense Act and reflect on both the important advances for indigent criminal defendants that resulted from this legislation and the challenges that remain. Speakers will include the bill's co-sponsors, Senators Rodney Ellis and Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa; and Lisa Foster, Director of the Office for Access to Justice of the U.S. Department of Justice.

The Fair Defense Act of 2001 fundamentally changed when and how lawyers are appointed to represent poor people accused of a crime in Texas. Before the Act, research from Texas Appleseed and others found a complete absence of uniformity in standards and quality in representation in indigent defense systems across Texas. In practice, this meant that defendants in some counties could wait for months to be determined indigent, then wait even longer to be appointed counsel. "Fifteen years later, much has changed," said Jim Bethke, Executive Director for the Texas Indigent Defense Commission. "All of Texas' 254 counties have developed and implemented plans to ensure fair and prompt appointment of counsel for the defendant, overseen and supported by the Texas Indigent Defense Commission." "Although much progress has been made, considerably more needs to be done to address the growing disparity between county and state funding," said Jim Allison, General Counsel for the County Judges and Commissioners Association of Texas.

"Texas Appleseed is honored to be part of this important opportunity to reflect on the way that the Fair Defense Act moved us toward a more fundamentally fair system," said Deborah Fowler, Executive Director for Texas Appleseed, a public interest justice center. "But this is also an important time to consider what more needs to be done to ensure that we do not have two systems of justice – with defendants who are indigent treated differently than others."

This event is sponsored by the Texas Indigent Defense Commission, Senator Rodney Ellis, Texas Appleseed, The Texas Fair Defense Project, The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition, The University of Texas School of Law, George J. Beto Criminal Justice Center at Sam Houston State University and Texas Defender Service.

Full program available at [this link](#). Event accredited for 2.25 MCLE hours.

The Symposium will be followed by a reception at the Hearsay Gastro Lounge, 218 Travis St, Houston, TX 77002.

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About Texas Appleseed

Texas Appleseed is a public interest justice center devoted to overturning unjust laws and policies that keep disadvantaged Texans from reaching their full potential. Texas Appleseed works on issues of criminal and juvenile justice reform, dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline, reforming the payday and auto title loan industry, and much more. For more information, visit www.texasappleseed.org

About the Texas Indigent Defense Commission

The Texas Indigent Defense Commission provides financial and technical support to counties to develop and maintain quality, cost-effective indigent defense systems that meet the needs of local communities and the requirements of the Constitution and state law. For more information, visit www.tidc.texas.gov